

DESIGNING DALLAS

the dallas art district's plan fulfilled

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Photos Courtesy Of: *Dallas Arts District*

When recently freed slaves founded St. Paul United Methodist Church in 1873, they probably never anticipated that their little corner of Freedman's Town in a then-segregated city, would become Downtown Dallas's cultural hub less than a century later. Today the church is known as the "Soul of the Arts District," but it is not the only place with a creative flare. An eclectic group of unique arts and cultural organizations, companies, museums, housing, and more, the design of today's Dallas Arts District was no accident.



DESIGNED WITH A PURPOSE

While its roots reach back to the first years following the American Civil War, the layout of the Dallas Arts District was not officially determined until the late 1970s when city officials and architects developed the Sasaki Plan, a system that would consolidate Dallas's arts and cultural institutions. Over a period of more than 30 years, the city steadily built and relocated its primary arts and cultural entities to a downtown area stretching from North Field Street to San Jacinto Street, spanning 68 acres and 19 contiguous blocks.

In 1976, Booker T. Washington High School, the first public African-American high school in Dallas, became Dallas ISD's magnet high school for visual and performing arts. Between 1975 and 2000, the Arts District also welcomed the addition of The Dallas Black Dance Theatre, the Dallas Museum of Art (*the center point of today's Arts District*), the Morton H. Meyerson Symphony Center, and the Crow Collection of Asian Art (*towards the end of that time frame*).

MODERN ADDITIONS TO THE ORIGINAL PLAN

In 2003, the Nasher Sculpture Center became the newest building on the block until 2009, when the AT&T Performing Arts Center opened. The Sasaki Plan, the project that began in the 1970s, finally came to completion, or so it seemed. However, in 2012, Dallas City Performance Hall opened and just a year later, Klyde Warren Park re-energized Dallas, bringing residents back outdoors and drawing them into the area like never before. Tara Green, president of Klyde Warren Park, said the park is proud to be surrounded by so many state-of-the-art visual and performing arts institutions.

"The Dallas Arts District is the largest contiguous cultural district in the nation, and we are honored to be positioned alongside these acclaimed venues,"



Photo By: *Christina White*

says Green. "The park complements the surrounding neighborhood perfectly – patrons can visit a museum or enjoy a concert, and then walk over to the park for a family afternoon outside or a nice dinner at Savor." Only months after Klyde Warren, the eye-catching Perot Museum of Nature and Science opened to the public as well.

Despite having their own individual histories, organizations and institutions such as Booker T. Washington, the Dallas Museum of Art (DMA), the Nasher Sculpture Center, the Crow Collection of Asian Art, and nearby parks and companies in the district collaborate to highlight the city's most intriguing artistic talent. Sarah Galaro, Communications and Operations Manager of the Dallas Art District, noted that this type of organizational integration is highly valued and encouraged. "Since 1997, the Dallas Arts District Foundation has granted more than \$1 million to seed collaborative, multidisciplinary and new work —bringing new audiences and artists into the District."



COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES IN THE ARTS DISTRICT

Collaboration across institutions is highly valued in the neighborhood. While each museum and center for arts and culture has a myriad of events, exhibits, and activities, the true draw of the Dallas Arts District is the way they foster community by working together for the well-being of the city.

Klyde Warren Park was built atop a highway, providing a green oasis amongst the skyscrapers. For downtown residents who love nature, the park offers so much, aside from the delicious food trucks, of course, that tend to congregate around the popular space. "On the first Saturday of each month, The Dallas Arts District hosts a variety of free activities," says Galaro. "The Perot Museum of Nature and Science brings science experiments for all ages to Klyde Warren Park. Every month brings a new theme, from biology and archeology, to physics and astronomy." Galaro boasts a range of workout regimes available for Klyde Warren Park patrons, including yoga, boot camp, Zumba, and everything in-between, while the nearby AT&T Performing Arts Center provides fitness enthusiasts with Zumba, Pilates, and yoga classes on Saturdays throughout the spring and fall months.

"Holidays in the district include everything from the Dallas Symphony Orchestra's holiday concerts to a tree-lighting ceremony in Klyde Warren Park and Reliant Lights Your Holidays at AT&T Performing Arts Center," Galaro said. During the times of year when the hubbub of the winter holidays has quieted down or not yet begun, "The Dallas Arts District facilitates an exciting collaboration amongst the Crow Collection of Asian Arts, the Dallas Museum of Art, and the Nasher Sculpture Center for the annual fall, spring, and summer block party." Featuring lectures, live music, games, film screenings, and progressive tours, these seasonal block parties are family friendly and welcoming to all who wish to partake. Additionally, all three museums are open late, offering special exhibits and activities.

If you are looking for an international flare, Galaro suggests The Crow Collection's Adventure Asia Family Days which take place once a month on the first Saturday, and feature art activities, performances, and, popular with the children, face painting. The Wellness Institute at the Crow Collection of Asian Art offers meditation, Tai Chi, Qigong, and yoga as well as free wellness classes and seminars that run daily.

For those interested in the city's award-winning architecture, the AT&T Performing Arts Center presents a 45-minute guided tour through the Winspear Opera House, Wylie Theater, Sammons Park, and Annette Strauss Square every Saturday.

"Additionally, every Thursday night from 5-9 p.m., the Dallas Museum of Art presents award-winning live jazz music at Jazz in the Atrium. Individuals can enjoy dinner and drinks while listening to live jazz concerts by some of the area's greatest musicians."

At the Nasher Sculpture Center, Target First Saturdays offer activities for the entire family, including art programs and scavenger hunts for children and art demonstrations and yoga for adults.

Tying the entire district together thematically is Aurora, a public contemporary art exhibition. "Aurora's aim is to immerse individuals into a larger, cultural conversation, amongst everyday spaces and disciplinary confines," Galaro explained. "The expansive and immersive exhibition presents interactive light, video, performance, and sound artworks throughout the entirety of the district."



THE SASAKI PLAN CONTINUES

From humble beginnings of a few buildings and a nearly 40-year plan in the 1970s to a booming arts district with something to offer each individual in Dallas's diverse population, it might not seem like much more could be added. Nevertheless, plans for new growth and expansions are already underway.

Breaking ground in 2015, Flora Lofts will serve the greater arts community by housing low-income artists at affordable rates. "Housing affordable to artists was called for in the original community development plan for the Arts District created by Sasaki & Associates but has not yet been fully realized," Galaro noted. "Flora Lofts will leverage the cultural assets already developed within the Dallas community while simultaneously bridging the socioeconomic and ethnic gaps within Dallas's urban core." Lofts on the building's upper floors will blend with street-level retail filled with companies like a café, gastropub, floral shop, technology gallery, and other creative neighborhood benefits.

Other plans for the district include the addition of parks with Wi-Fi and other coveted features.

Needless to say, this area offers a little something for everyone, young and old alike. Whether a fan of outdoor recreation, fine art, music, or cultural exhibitions, something can be found in the Dallas Arts District that will be of interest to you. Make sure to check out downtown Dallas's cultural and artistic gem; you will be glad you did.